

WRITTEN TESTIMONY TO THE HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE

RE: RAISED BILL No. 5355 – AN ACT CONCERNING AN ADVANCED DENTAL HYGIENE PRACTICE PILOT PROGRAM

MARCH 12, 2010

Submitted by Katherine S. Yacavone, President/CEO
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I submit this written testimony in support of a Pilot Program as described in Bill No. 5355, to demonstrate the efficacy of establishing an Advanced Dental Hygiene Practice degree program (a master's level degree). An Advanced Practice Dental Hygiene program will serve to increase access to care for the State's most vulnerable and medically needed residents and increase the capacity of oral health providers to deliver care in a variety of dental practice settings. As the President/CEO of a large, Federally Qualified Health Center in Bridgeport, CT, the oral health needs of our clients continue to grow with each passing year. The Health Center's capacity to serve clients on a daily basis is dependent upon operatory space, number of practitioners, and the oral health needs of our clients. In 2009, Southwest Community Health Center rendered 21,833 dental visits to 10,081 clients ranging in ages from 1 year to 75+ years. Southwest has two dental sites with 7 operatories at each site. Southwest employs 5.4 FTE dentists and 4.0 FTE dental hygienists. Southwest also has initiated provision of dental hygiene services in four school-based health centers in Bridgeport. The practitioners at our two main sites deliver emergency walk-in care to clients as well as treat their own scheduled patients on a daily basis. Our dental hours of operation include expanded evening hours twice a week until 8:00 p.m. and Saturdays from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. The complexity of oral health needs varies by client, but all clients need both preventive care and restorative and/or rehabilitative dentistry.

The Southwest oral health providers tell me that there is "never enough" time in the day to meet the clients' demand for care. Without the ability to add operatories or hire more provider staff, our strategy to serve more clients as effectively as possible must be to incorporate more efficient delivery care techniques. One strategy Health Centers could adopt would be to employ advanced practice dental hygienists. These practitioners, working side by side with dentists, would be able to perform an expanded range of palliative and therapeutic services, which, in turn, would allow the dentists to devote their clinical time to the treatment of more advanced restorative procedures.

Southwest has a long history of collaboration with the Fones School of Dental Hygiene. Our Health Center has served as a dental hygiene practicum site for many years and I serve on their Community Advisory Committee. The Fones School, the first school of dental hygiene in the country, has seen the need for such an advanced degree program and has advocated for such a program in the past.

Oral health is one of the keys to an individual's overall well-being. Connecticut's community health centers, as safety net providers, have always been ready and willing to adopt best practice models to increase access to care and improve the quality of health care delivery to the state's most vulnerable and impoverished residents. Adopting the use of advance dental hygienists is another best practice model whose time has come.

I urge the Human Services Committee to establish an advance degree program for dental hygienists and undertake the Hartford Pilot Program.

Thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,

Katherine S. Yacavone
President/CEO